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Ministry of Health

B.C. INTRODUCES NEW HEALTH STATUTES

VICTORIA – Health Minister George Abbott today introduced the Health Miscellaneous Statutes Act, which will make a number of changes to existing legislation, including greater transparency in the work of the Medical Services Commission.

Section 49 of the Medicare Protection Act will be amended to provide the Medical Services Commission, the body that administers complaints and investigations under the act, and the health minister with greater discretionary powers to disclose information on complaints and investigations in the public interest.

"Greater transparency in our health-care system was a commitment from the 2008 speech from the throne, and we are making changes to the Medicare Protection Act to increase transparency," said Abbott. "When the act was created by the previous government in 1992, Section 49 prevented the release of any information to the public on the actions and outcomes of investigations by the Medical Services Commission. British Columbians have asked for more transparency in their health-care system, and we are delivering on that today."

The legislation will also amend sections of the Health and Social Services Delivery Improvement Act, in accordance with the agreements reached between the government and health unions in January 2008, to address issues arising from a 2007 Supreme Court of Canada decision. Building on the 2006 labour agreements, the recent agreements focus on putting direct patient care first.

The Health Sector Partnerships Agreement Act, introduced in 2003, contains provisions similar to the Health and Social Services Delivery Improvement Act, and will also be amended.

In addition, government introduced housekeeping amendments to support last fall's decision to eliminate ambulance fees for Medical Services Plan premiums assistance clients. Prior to last October's policy change, 68,000 MSP premium assistance clients were billed for ambulance service each year. Those bills have now been eliminated. An additional change to the act will simplify appointments to the Emergency and Health Services Commission.

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1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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